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ABSTRACT

Effective leadership is more than the ability to demonstrate specific skills. The validity of early effective principal and leadership trait research has been questioned by recent studies. School improvement formulas that are narrowly focused on basic skills could easily lead to more demanding treatment of students. Recent studies show that effective principals have priorities and leadership traits that reflect conscious concern for students. "Proactive" is the term commonly used to describe overall characteristics of effective administrators. These include a motivation toward positive achievement and a balance between task and interpersonal relations. Five major behavioral areas of effective leaders are: (1) a vision (clear goals); (2) an ability to communicate the vision; (3) a concern for a supportive environment; (4) a tendency not only to monitor teacher performance but also to give insights into observed behavior; and (5) an intervention process to reward the positive and correct problems. Certain common, observable factors are exhibited by effective principals, including a concern for all aspects of the educational endeavor and an understanding that improvement involves change. (EJS)

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The Leadership of Effective Principals

Effective leadership is more than being able to demonstrate specific skills and abilities when necessary. Researchers who have studied the characteristics of principals of effective schools conclude that what truly distinguishes the effective from the less effective principal is an active style of leadership and a clear vision of what constitutes an effective school. Such leaders act positively, consistently, and comprehensively to create effective schools. Effective principals are leaders who seek the best outcomes and take the initiative and responsibility to improve their schools. They are not just managers who attend to events and perform as required merely to keep their schools running efficiently without making waves.

Simplistic Formulas Encourage Authoritarian Leadership

Early attempts to identify effective principals and specify leadership traits indispensible for school success were based on factors that have become known as the *Effective Schools Model* (Edmonds, 1979). Several later researchers have questioned the validity of the methods used for defining the effectiveness of schools. Good and Brophy (1986) point out that using student achievement on standardized tests as the chief measure of effectiveness is questionable. Focusing primarily on those few behaviors of principals and teachers that seem to be most directly related to achieving high test scores can severely limit the scope of student learning activity, teacher performance, and educational outcomes (Wayson, 1988).

Wayson suggests that limited formulas that are strongly and narrowly focussed on achieving higher scores on basic skills could easily lead administrators and teachers who are comfortable in rigid, traditional bureaucratic systems to feel justified in being more demanding and manipulative than ever. Such behavior may result in increased scores for some students in the short run, but it also contributes to the continuance of several serious, negative aspects of public education, such as high dropout rates and high teacher turnover, that have become political as well as economic issues throughout the country.

More recent studies of effective schools, including many of those rewarded for *excellence*, show that the character of these schools is far more complex and varied than previously recognized (see Stedman, 1987). Similarly, recent examinations of the behavior of principals in these outstanding schools indicate that these successful principals have priorities and leadership traits which reflect a conscious concern for much more in the way of positive results than high test scores at any cost.

Research on Effective Principals

All principals want to succeed in their positions. All are involved and active in ways that influence the character of their schools. Effective principals of effective schools, however, seem to exhibit a kind of deliberate, comprehensive leadership that operates in multiple ways to achieve school goals.

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Proactive is a term researchers have used to describe the overall characteristics of effective principals, implying that these principals actively champion their causes. However, the word denotes more than just being active in pursuit of specific goals. Effective principals whose schools achieve highly positive results have aims that encompass more than high quantitative scores. To these leaders, the means as well as the ends are important. Indeed, to some, working to make the process of teaching and learning positive and enjoyable to everyone involved may be essential to their effectiveness and to their students' success.

In a review of research focusing on the leadership of principals, Leithwood and Montgomery (1982) concluded that effective principals could clearly be classified as proactive, while typical principals primarily tended to be responsive, or reactive, to the demands of the district and other sources of problems encountered everyday. Effective principals had clear goals, both short- and long-term, and their priorities dealt with the happiness and achievement of students.

While they tried to achieve a balance between task and interpersonal relationships, their first priority was to have a good school. Effective principals communicated high expectations to teachers. These expectations were coupled with assumptions that programs would always be changing to better serve learners. Furthermore, these principals seemed to attend to all aspects of the educational endeavor.

A study by Croghan and Lake (1984) addressed the competencies of both adequate and high-performing principals. This study concluded that the characteristics that distinguished high-performing principals described a proactive orientation. This included motivation toward positive achievement; efforts to relate to others effectively and to have clear communication; persuasiveness; striving to be well-informed and gather essential information for decision-making; conceptual flexibility; managing staff interaction well; monitoring progress toward goals; promoting the welfare of students; and displaying concern for the feelings of teachers, parents, and students.

A study at the University of Texas at Austin characterized effective and ineffective principals using data gathered from interviews with principals, teachers, and central office staff. Rutherford (1985) reported clear differences in five major behavioral areas: Vision, Translating the Vision, Supportive Environment, Monitoring, and Intervening. The results of this study portrayed effective principals as proactive in the sense used in the studies mentioned above, although Rutherford and his associates did not use *proactive* as a descriptor. Rutherford elaborated on the five areas as follows:

Vision -- When asked, "What is your vision for this school -- your long-range goals and expectations?", effective principals, without hesitation, began to list their goals with an enthusiasm that reflected a personal belief in and active support of these goals. Less-effective principals had no such vision and focused on maintaining tranquility in the here and now.

Translating the Vision -- Teachers serving with those principals who had visions for the future of their schools described these schools as good places for students and teachers, and the teachers were aware of and could communicate their principals' visions.

A Supportive Environment -- Effective principals allocated funding and materials in ways that maximized teaching effectiveness and student achievement. In addition, they selectively and systematically controlled other support mechanisms, such as scheduling, to positively support progress toward achieving established goals.

Monitoring -- The more-effective principals provided not only details about the

performance of their teachers but also insights into why the teachers performed as they did, having taken the time and effort necessary to discover what was actually happening in classrooms. Less effective principals spent more of their working time handling management or administrative tasks that did not provide them with the information and insight effective principals had gathered.

Intervening -- The effective principals looked for position features of instruction and then directly and sincerely recognized and praised teachers responsible. Although effective principals emphasized the positive, they also spotted problems and took the necessary corrective actions.

Expanding The Concept Of Effective Principals' Leadership

The studies highlighted here portray several key aspects of the characteristics of effective principals. These characteristics define something more comprehensive, and perhaps more significant, about principals than the fact that they exhibit certain common observable behaviors.

The first of these key aspects is deliberate action to facilitate the achievement of success by students in areas established by school goals. All principals act to influence what happens in their schools. However, effective principals clearly have student achievement as a priority and work in multiple ways to support this priority.

The second aspect is recognizing the importance of student and staff attitudes, specifically that positive attitudes and feelings of satisfaction stimulate achievement. Less-effective principals seem less concerned about the affective domain. At times it appears that less-effective principals are willing to use any means that they think will achieve the desired ends.

The third aspect is concern about and involvement in all aspects of the educational endeavor. Effective principals recognize that all links in the chain are important and that someone has to monitor all these links to insure that they are in good condition and operate to facilitate progress toward school goals. Toward this end, effective principals seek, in a variety of ways, the breadth and depth of information they need to make good decisions, ones that are appropriate, relevant, and truly supportive of progress toward the established goals.

The fourth aspect is recognition that improvement involves change. Meeting all the challenges of effective teaching and learning requires not only carefully monitoring what is happening, but also being prepared to adjust and adapt in a variety of ways to make progress continuous and relevant for the particular students in the school.

The fifth, and probably most important aspect, is understanding that the quality of communication among the participants in the total educational environment will profoundly affect the success of means as well as the nature of all results. Regardless of school goals or a principal's private agenda, the effective principal knows that creating a high level of cooperative involvement and getting the best contributions from everyone requires stimulating a variety of constructive communication opportunities in all areas of the educational enterprise. It seems clear that effective principals communicate messages and encourage kinds of communication among participants that are different from those of less effective principals. It is not that effective principals necessarily communicate more clearly or more often but that they communicate in ways that help positive achievement to happen.

Schools can be much more than factories for the production of high numbers on computer printouts. Excellence has multiple visible aspects and interrelated causes. Deliberate, consistent, and positive leadership by principals is clearly a major

influence in schools where success is something going on all the time and not merely a limited, discrete result periodically revealed by standardized test scores.

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